

APR 11 1968
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NEW YORK TIMES
 21 July 1968

Kissinger Calls Printing of Pentagon Papers Proper

By WOLFGANG SAXON

Former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger has stated that the press did nothing improper by publishing the Pentagon Papers in 1971 although he was "outraged" by their appearance in public at the time.

In an interview with American Heritage magazine, Mr. Kissinger discussed international relations, diplomacy and the secrecy required during sensitive negotiations like the ones he was then conducting to end the war in Vietnam. Mr. Kissinger was national security adviser to President Richard M. Nixon and, he said, "most intensely concerned with controlling leaks" that could compromise those talks.

But he says in the magazine's August-September issue:

"I do not believe that it is the press's job to discipline itself about what information it receives, or to reject information it can obtain, on the ground that it might harm a negotiation. The media are in no position to make such a judgment."

At the same time, Mr. Kissinger remained critical of government officials like Daniel Ellsberg, the former Government official who helped compile the 47-volume study on United States involvement in Southeast Asia from World War II to 1968.

Mr. Ellsberg passed on the secret study to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1969. He later said he was the one who gave the documents to the press.

"If the press broke into a Government office, I would think that highly improper," Mr. Kissinger told Robert Bendiner, the author, who interviewed him for American Heritage. "And I have contempt for individuals in government who turn over to the press classified documents in their trust. But

I don't have contempt for those in the press who receive it."

Mr. Kissinger said he found the receipt of stolen information by the press deplorable.

Outraged at the Time

"But," he added, "I do not think the media should censor themselves with respect to information that has come their way, provided they did not commit the act of theft or get somebody else to steal it for them. But if somebody takes a document and gives it to them, however ill I think of the thief, it is not the media's responsibility to police themselves in that regard."

Mr. Bendiner then observed that, in other words, it was all right for the press to publish the papers but that Mr. Ellsberg should not have made them available.

"At the time I was outraged by the whole procedure, which seemed to me to threaten vital and delicate negotiations in which we were engaged," Mr. Kissinger responded. "On sober reflection I would go along with the distinction I have just made."

When The Times began to publish its series of articles based on the Pentagon study, along with documents contained in it, the Nixon Administration went to court to prevent their publication. But the United States Supreme Court issued a benchmark ruling that this would violate the free-press guarantees of the Constitution.

The Government charged Mr. Ellsberg with espionage, theft and conspiracy only to have the indictment thrown out by a Federal judge on the ground of improper government conduct against the defendant.